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Why We Can't Afford to Cut Adult Education

by [Megan Greenwell](#) May 12, 2010 01:01 PM (PT) Topics: [Education Equality](#), [The Great Recession](#)

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There are a lot of bad ideas for budget cuts out there, but slashing funds for adult education programs may be one of the worst. Yet that's exactly what huge numbers of local governments have done or are considering. Adult education is a general term used to describe courses that teach GED preparation, English as a second language, literacy, computer skills and much more. They are invaluable for millions of adults who didn't get the education they need through more traditional channels. And, unsurprisingly, demand for adult education programs has skyrocketed during the recession as laid-off people seek skills that will help them get a new job.

The most brutal cuts to adult education appear to be in [California](#), where a whopping 71 percent of local school districts report they cut adult education programs last year. In several northern California communities, officials are cutting adult ed funding by [more than 50 percent](#) in an effort to close massive budget gaps. Across the country, Pennsylvania legislators are considering making [even deeper cuts](#) to adult education after the programs absorbed a \$6 million budget reduction last year.

The short-sightedness of cutting adult ed programs cannot be overstated. This recession has taken a severe toll on people who were already hurting because of some combination of low income, unemployment, lack of education, hunger and poor living conditions. Bringing America back to prosperity means reducing the unemployment rate and increasing people's wages so they can afford to support their own basic needs. Ironically, cutting adult education works directly against these goals. People need adult education because they don't have the certification or skills they need to get good jobs; by eliminating their options for further education, governments are guaranteeing more people will be forced into unemployment or low-skill, low-paying jobs.

I sometimes wonder if I'm being somewhat unfair when I criticize governments' decisions on budget cuts; after all, revenue is down and need is up, so they have to cut *something*. But all too often, the knife falls first [on programs for the neediest residents](#). Surely there are administrators' salaries or programs offered only to kids in the wealthiest public schools that could be cut before the ones that help people living in poverty. What's frustrating to me about cutting adult ed is that it just continues a cycle of disenfranchisement: people who were kept from receiving a good education as children now will be prevented from catching up as adults. Here's hoping politicians wake up and see the error of their ways before they make the recession's human toll much greater than it is already.

Photo credit: [The Udall Legacy Bus Tour: Views from the Road](#)



[Megan Greenwell](#) was most recently a staff reporter for *The Washington Post*, covering philanthropy and nonprofits, education and the war in Iraq.

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